In the Specification:

Please amend the specification as shown:

Please delete the paragraph on page 11, lines 23-37 and replace it with the following paragraph:

This amino acid-sequenced HBV core-related antigen is designated hereinafter as the HBV precore protein. The HBV precore protein of the present invention, when compared to the HBV precore protein (pre HBe antigen) previously reported by TAKAHASHI et al. (Journal of Immunology, 147, 3156-3160, 1991), lacks methionine at the N-terminal (position -29) and the glutamine at position -28 has been acetylated. At the C-terminal end, arginine has been bound to valine at position 149 which is the C-terminal of HBe antigen, and amino acids are present at least up to position 150. As this HBV precore protein is not recognized by the monoclonal antibody HB50 that recognizes a region containing SPRRR **(SEQ ID NO: 7)** among the HBV nucleic acid-binding site, it is likely to contain amino acids up to position 154.

Please delete the paragraph on page 20, lines 14-28 and replace it with the following paragraph:

By epitope analysis, the HB50 antibody has been demonstrated to recognize amino acids (SQSPRRRRS**; SEQ ID NO: 8**) at positions 168-176, and in addition, it has also been found to react to a peptide (STLPETTVVRRRGRSPRRR**; SEQ ID NO: 9**) at positions 141-159 and a peptide (RRRGRSPRRRTPSPRRRR**; SEQ ID NO: 10**) at positions 150-167. The common sequence of these peptide is SPRRR **(SEQ ID NO: 7)**, and at least this sequence is required for binding to the HB50 antibody. Thus, as this SPRRR **(SEQ ID NO: 7)** sequence is located at position 155 or after, the HBV precore/core protein of the present invention is likely to lack the sequence at position 155 or after. This is also clear from the fact that a peak in the HBc antigen assay system that uses HB50 antibody alone as a labelled antibody does not superimpose on the peak of the HBV precore/core protein (Fig. 2, Fig. 3).